

VZCZCXRO7069  
PP RUEHPB  
DE RUEHSV #0469/01 3052355  
ZNY CCCCC ZZH  
P 012355Z NOV 06  
FM AMEMBASSY SUVA  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 3399  
INFO RUEHGB/AMEMBASSY BAGHDAD PRIORITY 0054  
RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA PRIORITY 1332  
RUEHPB/AMEMBASSY PORT MORESBY PRIORITY 0933  
RUEHWL/AMEMBASSY WELLINGTON PRIORITY 1118  
RHMFSS/HQ USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL PRIORITY  
RHHMUNA/HQ USPACOM HONOLULU HI PRIORITY  
RHHJJAA/JICPAC HONOLULU HI PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 SUVA 000469

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/02/2016  
TAGS: PREL MARR CASC ASEC FJ  
SUBJECT: FIJI'S CIV-MIL SITUATION AWAITS NEXT STEPS

REF: SUVA 466 (AND PREVIOUS)

Classified By: Amb. Dinger. Sec. 1.4 (B,D).

Summary

11. (C) Republic of Fiji Military Forces (RFMF) Commander Bainimarama is returning early to Fiji. On the way, he has had a series of media interviews, reiterating past rhetoric: that he does not intend a coup but that bloodshed will come if Prime Minister Qarase fails to accede to military demands.

Vice President Madreiwivi is fatalistic, believing all concrete RFMF demands are "pretext" for an inevitable coup. Qarase is worn down but is still searching for solutions that might save the day. Police Commissioner Hughes reportedly believes there will be no coup because the RFMF is not united behind their Commander and they have agreed to sideline Bainimarama, one way or another. We note in comment that, while Bainimarama may be simply exerting pressure to reform the Qarase Government, the VP and PM both seem to believe that the Commodore's real intent is to take power. The Hughes scenario would be terrific if, repeat if, the military really is on board. End summary.

Bainimarama on the way back to Fiji

12. (C) It appears RFMF Commander Bainimarama is on his way back to Fiji from the Middle East. He has skipped scheduled stops in Kuwait/Iraq and reportedly was attempting to reroute to fly Korea Air from Cairo to Seoul to Nadi. Another report suggests the new route might be via London and Los Angeles. Reportedly, Bainimarama is deliberately evading Australia, fearing he might be arrested there. Latest reports are that he is to arrive Nadi early tomorrow, Friday Nov. 3. Armed RFMF troops reportedly are already in Nadi to escort him to Suva. Police do not intend to interfere.

Thursday calm; Friday is budget day

13. (C) Today (Thurs, Nov. 2) is the sixth anniversary of the put-down of an RFMF mutiny that endangered Bainimarama's life. Tomorrow (Fri, Nov. 3) is the opening of Parliament's budget session. There have been rumors that one of the two days would be "coup day." Today has been calm in the streets. Tomorrow may be also, though a rumor is floating that the RFMF may be planning a "show of force" march through the streets from the main barracks to Parliament House just in advance of the budget-session opening. Acting RFMF Commander Capt. (Navy) Teleni has denied there will be any march tomorrow.

Media interviews: more troubling rhetoric

¶4. (SBU) Bainimarama's travel schedule has not slowed down his interactions with regional media. Fiji, Australia, and New Zealand radio stations have played interviews today in which the Commodore denied that he ever set a three-week deadline for PM Qarase to reform or resign, and he gave assurance that he does not intend a coup. He added, "Dialogue is fine, as long as the Government meets our demands." With that, "Everyone can kiss and make up and live happily ever after." In another interview, he said, "The last thing we want to do is have violence, the last thing we want to do is have bloodshed, but Qarase is pointing us in that direction. The fact that he does not want to accede to our request, the fact that he does not want to resign, and his call to the Great Council of Chiefs means to the military that he has put us in a situation where there is going to be bloodshed and violence." In yet another interview, Bainimarama suggested that, if Qarase refuses to accept RFMF advice, including to clean up corruption, to remove Members of Parliament who were involved in the 2000 coup, and to withdraw controversial bills that "could set Fiji back hundreds of years and cause Fijians to hack each other to pieces," the PM must resign. Needless to say, such rhetoric keeps people on edge.

Meetings in the works

-----  
¶5. (C) Acting RFMF Commander Teleni and Land Forces Commander Col. Driti are to meet with PM Qarase late this (Thurs) afternoon. The CEO of the PM's office suggested to us the RFMF officers signaled some positive news would be forthcoming. The CEO added that the PM intends to meet with the Chiefs of Mission for Australia, New Zealand, and the U.S., plus the Secretary General of the Pacific Forum,

SUVA 00000469 002 OF 002

probably tomorrow (Fri) to give thanks for messages of support for rule of law and to provide an update on Fiji's situation.

A depressed and fatalistic VP

-----  
¶6. (C) Vice President Madreiwivi told a good source today that he accepts the PM's charge that the President and he exhibited weakness when they backed down from attempting to suspend Bainimarama earlier this week (refs). The VP feels justified, though, in that he "put off the inevitable for a short while." He added that the suspension order on Bainimarama will be rescinded. He suggested fatalistically: "que sera sera." Madreiwivi reportedly accepts that the Great Council of Chiefs (GCC) meeting which PM Qarase has called for next week may have on its agenda replacement of both the President and VP. While that move could serve as a "pretext" for military intervention, he said, "almost anything may be a pretext at this point."

Police Commissioner describes plan to resolve all

-----  
¶7. (C) Police Commissioner Hughes, on the other hand, described today a plan intended to provide a way out for Fiji. He revealed to a good source that the RFMF's Teleni and Driti (see para 5) have agreed with the Government to be the conduit of an offer for Bainimarama to become Fiji's High Commissioner to London or Wellington, his choice. Hughes reports that if Bainimarama refuses, the RFMF senior leadership, now united against any coup, have agreed that Bainimarama will appear before the Police to answer charges of sedition. Hughes believes that the RFMF has been shaken by the experience of turning aside President Iloilo's suspension order of Bainimarama. The timing was wrong for that, with Bainimarama out of the country. However, once the Commodore is back, the above plan is seen as acceptable to the military.

Comment

-----  
¶8. (C) The people of Fiji and Embassy Suva are taking life

one day at a time at the moment, awaiting Bainimarama's return. It is certainly possible that all the threats have been simply intended to force reforms on the Qarase Government. It is possible that Qarase, with GCC cover, will back down on the controversial bills, one of which (the so-called reconciliation bill) hasn't even been introduced yet in the present Parliament (though a new, and supposedly dramatically improved version is on the drawing boards). The other two bills in Bainimarama's sights (both relating to ethnic-Fijian land issues) have been introduced, but have been taking plenty of flak in committee hearings. So, if the bills are the key to satisfying Bainimarama, a "compromise" may be possible, and a resumed, one-sided "dialogue" may achieve it.

¶9. (C) However, some, like the VP and PM perceive Bainimarama's specific "requests" to be "pretext." They think, regardless of any efforts to find a compromise, the Commodore has decided to force a change of government, now or soon. Qarase thinks Bainimarama wants to be dictator; others a bit more charitably think he sincerely believes that removing Qarase and his "cronies" is essential if Fiji is to have a peaceful, prosperous future. Since the people didn't do the job in last May's elections, the RFMF, in that view, must do it now, regardless of the consequences for Fiji's tourism industry and the negative international reactions that would ensue.

¶10. (C) Whether the bulk of the RFMF would actually execute a coup order remains unclear. The scenario Commissioner Hughes describes depends on the actual state of affairs within the military. We know Bainimarama has been offered diplomatic postings before, including to Wellington, and has turned them down. If, and it is a big if, the troops really are shaken by recent events, if they really would just say "no" to a coup order, and if they would turn over Bainimarama to authorities, that would be a wonderful solution. We will hope for that and keep our powder dry.

DINGER